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Jennifer Hubbard

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THE COMMISSION OF CONSERVATION AND THE CANADIAN ATLANTIC FISHERIES

Jennifer Hubbard[1]

The best ideas in the world often go unheeded. A case in point is the fate of the 1913–14 resolutions formulated by the Commission of Conservation for the purpose of improving the Atlantic Canadian fishing industry. Although these resolutions were timely and, if followed up, would have done much to make the Atlantic fishing industry more efficient and Canadian fisheries products more competitive on the world market, they were not forwarded by the economic priorities or political temper of the Canadian government, nor by the interruption in everyday affairs imposed by World War I.

The often troubled history of the Commission of Conservation did not help. Created by an Act of Parliament on 12 May 1909, the Commission was a direct consequence of the North America Conference on Conservation, held in Washington, DC in February 1909, to which President Theodore Roosevelt invited Canadian participation. This was an era of growing awareness that natural resources are not limitless and that the environment is not immune from the effects of human activity.

Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier strongly supported the idea of the Commission, which would meet annually, attracting the interest of all aware people, the universities and the provinces. At these meetings information could be gathered to be circulated among the people. Carelessness, ignorance and inattention to the matter of conservation were among the chief causes cited for the waste of natural resources.[2] The Commission's mandate was to increase public awareness of the need for conservation and to investigate problem areas to determine how the conservation of various resources could better be effected. In spite of its unique role, however, the Commission of Conservation often had to be defended against charges that it merely duplicated the work - and expense - of legitimate government departments.

Part of the problem lay in the nature of the Commission. Its work touched on wide areas of interest, as reflected in its subdivision into seven committees: Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals; Forests; Lands; Minerals; Waters and Water Powers; and Public Health. The seventh committee was the Committee on Press and Cooperating Organizations,

1 Institute for History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, University of Toronto.

2 Canada, House of Commons, *Debates* [hereafter *Debates*], 12 May 1909, 6367–70.

responsible for promoting and publicizing the work of the Commission and for encouraging public awareness about the conservation movement. The other committees were to research pertinent conservation problems and develop policies for their solution.[3] With such wide interests, it was inevitable that some of the Commission's work would be viewed as being redundant. What, for example, could the Commission of Conservation do in the areas of mines, lands and mineral resources that was not already in the domain of the Department of Mines and the Geological Survey of Canada?

However, those who were involved could argue that the Commission served a special role. It incorporated authorities at all levels: federal, provincial and municipal. The British North America Act had reserved natural resources for provincial authority; therefore, it was absolutely essential to enlist provincial cooperation in conservation matters. The Commission was set up in such a way as to facilitate that cooperation.

Twenty commissioners were appointed to the Commission by the Governor-General. Ex-officio members would include the Federal Ministers of Agriculture, of the Interior and of Mines, and the member of each provincial government who was responsible for the administration of natural resources. In addition, 'at least one member appointed from each province was to be 'a member of the faculty of a university within such province, if there be such university.'[4]

The Commission's first task was to gather statistics and data dealing with natural resources; the information gathered previously by census officers, although accurate, had little to do with natural resources. Clifford Sifton, who was appointed chairman of the Commission by the Governor General, stated: '... it is the first essential to give an accurate and complete statement of facts, readily available, accessible to all, and couched in lan-

3 Stuart Renfrew, 'Commission of Conservation,' in *Douglas Library Notes* XIX (Kingston, 1971), 21.

4 Canada, Commission of Conservation, *Report of the First Annual Meeting, 1910* (Ottawa, 1910), vii.

guage that the average reader could understand.'[5] The Commission's role was, in fact, to be an educational one.

Among the Commission's accomplishments was the discovery that many forest fires, which destroyed so much valuable timber, were caused by railway locomotives. After agitating several years for new regulations, the Commission was rewarded when, in May 1912, the Board of Railway Commissions 'made railways responsible under the jurisdiction of the Commission of Conservation for the prevention and control of fires started by trains.'[6] In the area of public health, the Commission was far-seeing in its advocacy of bacterial sewage treatment in 1916, 'long before municipalities were pointing with pride to their new sewage disposal plants.'[7] The Commission also devoted its attention to the conservation of mineral resources and an 'exhaustive report on the conservation of coal was issued in 1914.'[8] In summing up the usefulness of the Commission of Conservation, Henri S. Béland said:

Ten years ago most of [the departments of natural resources] gave little or no attention to any work of investigation for conservation purposes ... Now, in

> some departments considerable organizations have been built up to do work of a character which prepares for, promotes and accomplishes conservation. A marked change has come over the attitude of the public towards conservation during the ten or twelve years of the Commission.[9]

The Commission had at least fulfilled its educational mandate.

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5 Ibid., 8.

6 Renfrew, 'Commission of Conservation,' 21-2. In his defence of the work of the Commission of Conservation, Henri S. Béland remarked: 'The results that have been thus obtained, if the Commission of Conservation had accomplished nothing further than this, amply justify all the money that has been expended by the commission since its organization ten or twelve years ago.' House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 May 1921, 6963. Béland was a long-term member of the Commission, from its inception in 1909 until its demise in 1921.

7 Ibid., 22-3.

8 *Debates*, 26 May 1921, 3965.

9 Ibid., 3966.

Charges that the Commission of Conservation was redundant and that its purpose was too vague continued throughout its entire span. These charges culminated in the 26 May 1921 parliamentary debate on a bill to abolish the Commission. The new Conservative government was led by Prime Minister Arthur Meighen, 'one of the Commission's most formidable opponents.'[10] Meighen complained that 'the work of the Commission has been most expensive, and one could look for nothing else in view of the irresponsible nature of the Commission.'[11] The telling word 'irresponsible' was Meighen's shorthand for another of his complaints – that the Commission was not responsible to a minister or 'as a branch of a department', yet was permanent in status. Advisory bodies, Meighen felt, should only be of a temporary nature. He especially objected to it as 'a body for which no one is answerable and over which no one has any control.'[12]

During the course of this debate, Meighen made some particularly acrimonious remarks concerning the Commission's involvement in fisheries questions:

> As regards fisheries I could quote from some proceedings of the commission itself, which would establish that it really was anomalous to have the Conservation Commission even acting in an advising capacity as regards fisheries.[13]

What particularly damned the Commission of Conservation's subcommittee, the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals, in Meighen's eyes was this: they had no fisheries expert and no one competent to advise on fisheries questions. Yet,

> ... they were offering "advice on fish culture, oysters, salmon, whitefish; they published a small library of treatises, and tried their hand in settling international, federal and provincial fisheries disputes".[14]

Meighen clearly thought they were overstepping their bounds. Three questions are raised by all of this. First, were the activities undertaken by the Committee of Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals with regards to fisheries truly superfluous? Had the same things been undertaken already by other government departments or commissions? Second, was Meighen

10 Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Conservation in Canada* (Toronto, 1978), 211.

11 *Debates*, 26 May 1921, 3989.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 3969.

14 Ibid.

correct in accusing the Committee of being incompetent to deal with such matters? Third, did this perception somehow affect the fate of the Committee's resolutions concerning the Atlantic fisheries? Answering such questions should throw light on the justice of Meighen's indictment of the entire Commission.

Questions involving the fisheries tend to be large and complicated, as was noted many times by the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals.[15] For this reason, this examination of the Committee's involvement in fisheries questions will be confined to the sea-fisheries of Eastern Canada. By no means was this the total undertaking of the Committee, for it also made important contributions to the conservation of whitefish in the Great Lakes and to the international question of conserving the British Columbia salmon fisheries. Its main work during World War I involved efforts to conserve endangered game and bird species, as is well documented in Janet Foster's *Working for Wildlife.*

My investigations indicate that the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals did not sustain any enquiries that overlapped with the work of other government departments. However, it did concentrate more effort than was necessary into the problems of the oyster fisheries, which were already receiving ample parliamentary attention. Its work on other fisheries involved educating fishermen to eliminate waste, improve their methods and to make the fisheries generally more efficient. The Committee never stepped on any toes in this work and steered clear of other current investigations and prominent controversies. Admittedly the Committee lacked a fisheries expert and had a high proportion of unenthusiastic ex-officio members. The dedicated long-term members, however, and those members whose duties included fisheries concerns, always took steps to become informed on the issues. The recommendations made by the Committee were sound, and there is no evidence that the supposed incompetence of the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals was responsible for the unhappy fate of their resolutions. The reasons for the recommendations' fall into oblivion will be dealt with in a later section.

THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, GAME AND FUR-BEARING ANIMALS

Ranging from six to eleven members over the years, the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals conducted investi-gations into fur farming, the conservation of game and the conservation of migratory

15 The first such observation was made at the first annual meeting by Francis L. Haszard, first acting chairman of the Committee. Commission of Conservation, *First Annual Report, 1910* 118.

birds, but, in the opinion of Janet Foster, 'the emphasis was on the commercial fisheries aspects of Committee investigations and reports. Indeed, during the first two annual meetings Sifton consistently referred to the committee as the "Fisheries Committee".'[16]

In his inaugural address to the Commission, Clifford Sifton stressed the importance of fisheries: 'No effort should be spared to promote its perpetuation and continuation.' Noting that ever since Confederation there had existed a department especially charged with the conservation of fish, that extensive and expert investigations had already and repeatedly been made, that the House of Commons had recently added a Committee of Fisheries to their list of standing select committees and that some of the provinces pursued an active policy with regard to their fisheries, Sifton gave the Committee its mandate:

> It will be a matter for you to decide as to what course can best be adopted to strengthen the hands of those who are charged with the important duty of dealing with this subject.'[17]

The fisheries were important because of their great commercial value.

> As Sifton stated in 1910, utilization was the end goal of conservation and there was little discussion by Commission members on the need for protection or conservation of those wildlife species whose value was not primarily economic.[18]

With regards to fisheries, as Foster writes, 'most committee recommendations were devoted to advancing measures for their more efficient utilization.'[19]

At its inception, the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals had a high proportion of ex-officio members. Dr Howard Murray of Dalhousie University was the only full member, and there were six ex-officio members. Over the years Murray was joined by Dr Cecil C. Jones, who became chairman of the Committee in 1912, and by Dr J.W. Robertson, the Chairman of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education in Ottawa, who also joined in 1912. Finally, J.P. Babcock joined in 1916. However, the majority of the Committee remained ex-officio.

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16 Foster, *op. cit.*, 42.

17 *First Annual Report, 1910*, 11-12.

18 Foster, *loc. cit.*

19 Ibid.

The large number of ex-officio members in this committee was probably a source of some of its problems and might have impaired its credibility. For one thing, there was a high turn-over rate amongst the ex-officio members, many of whom lasted only a year or two. This may have resulted in apathy on their part towards the Committee's activities and certainly prevented them from becoming experts in the Committee's investigations. A good indicator of this is the low ex-officio attendance at the Committee's special conferences.

For example, at the first of these, about the sea-fisheries of Eastern Canada, only J.A. Mathieson, Premier of Prince Edward Island, represented the ex-officio members, and he had a vested interest in the oyster fisheries, which received much attention. At a more general meeting held in 1915, Orlando T. Daniels, Attorney General of Nova Scotia, and Aubin E. Arsenault, member from Summerside and later Premier of Prince Edward Island, were the only ex-officio members present. Even at the annual meetings held by the Commission, the usual count of the Committee's ex-officio members was one or two, usually the same ones, with three being present at the peak year in 1916.

In his indictment of the Commission on its fisheries activities, Prime Minister Meighen was particularly condemnatory. He claimed that in seeking for a fisheries expert and advisor, the Commission

> ... persuaded a Dr. Jones to undertake this work, and Dr. Jones, upon being requested to do so, said that he had not only an open mind but almost a vacant one on the subject; that while he would be glad to try the experiment for a year, if he did not accomplish anything, he supposed someone else would take the matter up. They did not succeed in getting that expert.[20]

In saying this, Meighen most vindictively twisted the facts, and it is amazing that no one took him up on this. Dr Cecil C. Jones, Chancellor of the University of New Brunswick, joined the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals not as an expert but as its first proper chairman. Francis L. Haszard, Premier of Prince Edward Island, had acted as Chairman temporarily in 1910 and 1911; and thereafter, for the January meeting of 1912, M.J. Patton, Assistant Secretary of the Commission of Conservation, stepped in as Acting Chairman. At the third annual meeting of the Commission held in Ottawa 16 January 1912, Patton expressed the need for a 'well-informed and energetic chairman' as the Committee had so far been working without direction.[21]

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20 *Debates*, 26 May 1921, 3969.

21 Commission of Conservation, *Report of the Third Annual Meeting, 1912* (Montreal, 1912), 35.

Jones was certainly energetic and enthusiastic, but when he stepped in as chairman, he could hardly be described as well informed. And indeed, he did admit that he came with not only an open mind but with 'almost a vacant one' on the subject of fisheries.[22] However, it is to his credit, and Meighen never mentioned this, that his first action was to organize the Committee conference of June 1912, dealing with the sea-fisheries of Eastern Canada. The main purpose of this was educational. The Committee members were gathering information from the best experts on fisheries science, conservation and administration to see what lines of work should be pursued. Although there was an air of great expectations, a cautious approach was followed at all times. Meighen's accusation about the lack of a fisheries expert was accurate, but the Committee cannot be accused of not trying to procure the services of one as it was recognized that the Committee was handicapped without an expert.

At the 1912 annual meeting of the Commission, Patton, the temporary Chairman of the Committee, complained that so far, the Committee had been gathering their information almost exclusively from documentary sources which could yield much data. 'Yet in dealing with concrete fishery problems, it is necessary that the investigator study the problem at first hand on the spot.'[23] Patton had indeed, for this meeting, prepared most of the materials on fisheries, including: a 'Memorandum on the Jurisdiction of the Dominion and Provincial Governments in Fisheries Matters,' statistics showing fisheries productivity, a report on the Canadian oyster industry and a general review of the character and extent of the fisheries of each province.[24]

During the fifth annual meeting in 1914, Jones stressed the need for a competent fisheries expert to take part in the Committee's work: '... it is impossible now to carry on certain important investigations in any definite way, owing to the absence of any paid expert.'[25] No progress had been made by the following year. The Committee had been on the point of obtaining a fisheries expert when the war broke out; and, 'As a result

22 Ibid., 84.

23 Ibid., 35.

24 Commission of Conservation, *Report of the Second Annual Meeting, 1911* (Montreal, 1911), 110-11.

25 Commission of Conservation, *Report of the Fifth Annual Meeting, 1914* (Toronto, 1914), 213.

the expert was not engaged, and it is as well that he was not, just at that time.'[26] The Committee felt hobbled without such an expert and expressed the hope that when conditions had improved, 'perhaps during the summer of 1916,'[27] the appointment would be made. In fact, the appointment was never made.

In the face of such a shortcoming, the Committee had to call on outside experts, particularly from the Biological Board of Canada, to aid in its investigations. A few investigative reports were also submitted by Committee members, such as 'Oyster Fisheries of Prince Edward Island' (1912) by PEI Premier J.A. Mathieson; 'Needs of the Fisheries of Nova Scotia' (1912) by Howard Murray; 'Technical Education in Relation to Fishermen's Operations' (1916) by James W. Robertson; and 'Oyster Culture in Prince Edward Island' (1916) by Aubin E. Arsenault. In addition, there were reports by Commission members who were not part of the Committee, especially by the Commission's Assistant Secretary and Editor, M.J. Patton, who submitted two articles on the oyster fishing industry in 1911 and in 1913.

The fact is that at the beginning, the Committee almost decided not to become involved with the fisheries. The acting chairman for the Committee, Francis L. Haszard, reported to the first annual meeting, that the Committee, being comprised of members who served in several other committees, had had no time to discuss fisheries matters and had decided that the questions involved were too large and complicated for the Committee to handle. However, after this decision was made, but too late to make a report, the Committee had been asked to take steps to save the British Columbia salmon fisheries because '... in Puget Sound, where the fish have to pass up the Fraser River to the spawning ground, they are being taken in immense quantities on the American side.'[28] Then the Committee also came to regard that:

> ... in the Maritime Provinces the lobster and oyster fisheries are the two very essential fisheries that require the attention of this Commission but these are subjects that will take a great deal of time... [and] involve much enquiry, as well as considerable expenditure of money, before a report can be made.[29]

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26 Commission of Conservation, *Report of the Sixth Annual Meeting, 1915* (Toronto, 1915), 225.

27 Ibid., 226.

28 *First Annual Report, 1910*, 188.

29 Ibid., 189.

However, even after finding there was work to be done, the Committee did not meet between 1910 and the second annual meeting which was held in Quebec 17 to 20 January 1911. Consequently, 'no scheme of work was mapped out.'[30] Rather, individuals in the Commission carried out investigations which seemed to be of importance. Patton submitted a report on the Canadian oyster industry, which appeared in the Commission's 1911 publication, *Lands, Fisheries and Game, Minerals*. Thereafter, the oyster industry was a dominant interest of the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals.

The Committee had good reason to hesitate before taking up fisheries questions. These lay within the domain of the Department of Marine and Fisheries and its loosely affiliated Board of Management of the Marine Biological Stations, which in 1912 became the Biological Board of Canada. These organizations, unlike the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals, had no lack of experts. However, at that time, the Department of Marine and Fisheries stretched its fisheries exertions between gathering fisheries statistics, upholding fisheries legislation and combatting as far as it could industrial practices that caused water pollution or otherwise harmed commercial fish stocks. As for the Board of Management, it was then a bastion of pure research over which the Department had little control. Formed in 1898 largely by academic scientists, its Biological Stations at St Andrews and Nanaimo were used, at least in the initial twenty years, as summer research havens where university scientists could collect together and pursue their individual interests in a congenial environment. The Board's biological interest was, like that of Woods Hole, focussed on marine organisms. The Biological Stations also facilitated the collection of biological materials for more leisurely studies back in the universities during the winter. A few practical investigations such as the effects of dynamiting fish and trawling and a very exhaustive one into the life cycle of oysters – which had practical ramifications – vied with the abundant faunal surveys, life histories, morphological studies and plankton surveys which prevailed in the early years of the Biological Stations. Among the most practical findings was the discovery that lobster hatcheries are totally inefficient, but the Board did little to address directly the larger problems encountered by fishermen in those years. In fact, the fishing industry attempted to have the Biological Board abolished in the years immediately following World War I because it was too academic.[31]

The Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals opted for different kinds of problems from those already being addressed by the

30 *Second Annual Report, 1911*, 110.

31 Ronald Hayes, *The Chaining of Prometheus: Evolution of a Power Structure for Canadian Science* (Toronto, 1973), 33.

Biological Board and the Department of Marine and Fisheries. For the most part the Committee chose wisely, as will be seen. Except for the earliest work on oyster culture, there was no overlap between the interests of the Commission of Conservation and the Biological board or other agencies.

THE COMMITTEE AND OYSTER CULTURE

The predicament of the oyster fisheries captured more of the Committee's attention than any other single fishery. This interest started with M.J. Patton's report of 1911, 'The Canadian Oyster Industry.' This article was researched well and contained the background to the problem and so will be dealt with here in some depth. Patton included a short natural history of the oyster and then considered all aspects of the troubled Canadian oyster fisheries. The supply of oysters, once thought to be inexhaustible, had been reduced to the 'verge of depletion' owing to 'ruthless exploitation and the demands of an increasing population.'[32] Some restrictive measures were then being enforced, including a close season, prohibition of ice fishing (in which oysters too small to be marketed were 'left on the ice to perish with the cold') the prohibition of Sunday fishing, size limits of oysters to be fished, oyster fishing licences and the prohibition of mud digging closer than two hundred yards from any live oyster bed.[33]

Restrictive measures, although all very good in themselves, could no longer regenerate the industry. What was needed was oyster culture on a large scale, as carried on by the Americans, French, British and others. However, under existing fisheries jurisdiction, oyster farming was not worth the risks:

> The decision of the Imperial Privy Council on the Fisheries Reference in 1898 divided in uncertain fashion the proprietary interest in the foreshore, and has effectively prevented the certainty of ownership which is essential to the investment of private capital in oyster farming.[34]

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32 M.J. Patton, 'The Canadian Oyster Industry,' in Commission of Conservation, *Lands, Fisheries and Game, Minerals* (Ottawa, 1911), 128.

33 Patton, *op. cit.*, 131-2. Mud digging was carried on by huge ice-borne machines which scraped the sea bottom of mud, which local farmers considered valuable fertilizer. The problem was that deposits of settling mud tended to smother the surrounding oysters, and the oyster beds were also cut up by this process.

34 Ibid., 128.

The Dominion Parliament possessed 'exclusive legislative authority in all matters respecting "Sea Coast and Inland Fisheries," ' but the British North America Act also gave 'the provinces exclusive power to issue licences to provide funds for provincial revenue.'[35] As matters stood, the oyster farmer could be liable to double taxation and double licensing and conflicting regulations. Patton suggested that provincial and Dominion authorities should meet and all power 'to lease oyster bottoms should be handed over to the Federal authorities in return for giving to the provinces a certain percentage of the fisheries to be agreed upon.'[36]

Once a leasing system had been established, the main obstacle to oyster farming would have been removed. Patton's recommendations also included government involvement in supplying potential oyster farmers with seed oysters and spawners, so no

> ... difficulty would be experienced by oyster farmers in getting sufficient seed oysters and spawners to plant their beds... [oyster farmers] should be further encouraged by the assurance of a supply of seed oysters and spawners for stocking their holdings.[37]

At the third annual meeting of the Commission of Conservation, Patton noted with satisfaction that in the time since his report had been published, the Dominion Government had begun negotiating with the Maritime provinces 'with a view to placing the oyster fishing industry entirely under Dominion Control,' in accordance with his recommendations. In fact, Patton's recommendations probably had little to do with this.[38]

It was at a special meeting held by the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals in Ottawa on 4 and 5 June 1912 that the fate of the leases for oyster bottoms was revealed. It was decided by 'an obstacle which had never been considered ... that the Government of Canada had no power to grant an exclusive right of fishery even in territory which it exclusively owned.'[39] Oyster bottoms were to be leased by the provinces, each of which was to make its own arrangements.

Dr Joseph Stafford of McGill University, a member of the Biological Board of Canada and a world authority on oysters, was a guest speaker at this special meeting on the sea fisheries of Eastern Canada. There were

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35 Ibid., 133.

36 Ibid., 135.

37 Ibid., 137, 139.

38 Ibid., 138.

39 J.A. Mathieson, 'Oyster Fisheries of Prince Edward Island,' Commission of Conservation, *Sea Fisheries of Eastern Canada* (Ottawa, 1912), 79–80.

also present at the gathering W.A. Found, the Superintendent of Fisheries for Canada; J.J. Cowie of the Department of Marine and Fisheries; and the Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Commission of Conservation, James White; and Patton. Committee members present were Clifford Sifton, Dr C.C. Jones, serving in his capacity as Committee Chairman for the first time, J.A. Mathieson, Dr Howard Murray and Dr J.W. Robertson.

Stafford told the meeting about his important work of 1904 in which he had followed the growth of oyster larvae from the period of six days until one month of age. What happened between these stages had previously been unknown, thereby creating a serious gap in the understanding of the growth and life cycle of the oyster.

Stafford then developed a method for predicting, with accuracy, the date at which oyster larvae in a region would settle and become spat. Here, human intervention could increase the number of suitable places for larvae to settle by introducing into the water at the right time ...

> ... laboriously prepared, clean, dry white cultch,[40] for the capture of oyster spat... The point is to be so secure in one's judgment as to quietly hold the cultch until this period arrives, for if put out even two or three days too soon it will become slimy and dirty and there will be a loss of efficiency which increases with time until the new cultch is no better than old natural objects that were in the water beforehand.[41]

In the discussion that followed, Found revealed that a demonstration area in Richmond Bay had been cleaned and planted with seed oyster, as had been another area just off Caribou Island. These were 'a little experiment for the purpose of leading the way' in the demonstration of oyster culture. Strangely, given his interests, Stafford was unaware of this development.[42]

Following this paper and another presented by Mathieson concerning the 'Oyster Fisheries of Prince Edward Island,' the Committee passed a resolution to urge the Department of Marine and Fisheries to carry on more demonstration and research work to improve methods of oyster culture and to increase the interest of oyster fishermen in the cultivation of oysters. Of particular interest to the Committee was the cultivation of oysters in barren grounds.[43]

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40 Cultch often consisted of cleaned wooden poles or strings of dry, cleaned old oyster shells used to catch the spat.

41 Joseph Stafford, 'On the Recognition of Bivalve Larvae in Plankton Collections,'in *Contributions to Canadian Biology* (1906-1910), 228.

42 Commission of Conservation, *Sea-Fisheries of Eastern Canada* (Ottawa, 1912), 47-8.

43 Ibid., 161.

At the fourth annual meeting held in Ottawa on 21 and 22 January 1913, the Committee adopted several other resolutions which had suggested themselves from the presentations and discussion at the conference on the sea-fisheries of Eastern Canada in 1912 and from a new paper which was presented by Patton at the fourth annual meeting.

In 'Oyster Farming in Prince Edward Island,' Patton was concerned that under existing regulations the oyster farmer could not market his produce whenever he wished, despite the fact that self-interest would see to it that he would do his own beds no harm. The close season prohibited this. The Commission passed a resolution that oyster cultivators be exempt from close-season regulations.

Patton also suggested that 'the Dominion fisheries protective service be improved so as to afford adequate protection to cultivated oyster beds. In its present condition it is almost worthless.'[44] The Commission passed a resolution to the effect that the fisheries protective service was inadequate, needed immediate reorganization and that this should be drawn to the attention of the Minister of Marine and Fisheries.[45]

Prior to the fifth annual meeting, Stafford had prepared for the Commission a monograph entitled *The Canadian Oyster: Its Development, Environment and Culture*, published in 1913. Referring to its technical character, Sifton noted:

> It has been the aim of the Commission to refrain from publishing anything except what contains prac- tical information in the most condensed form and popular language. In this case, however, the nature of the subject and the highly important character of the studies ... made it desirable and, in fact, imperative, that we should print the work in its full scientific form, in order that there might be available in the future for every student of the subject, a record of the work which has been done.[46]

The Canadian Oyster was in a large part comprised of all of Stafford's researches to date. The second part of the book outlined schemes for 'rendering assistance to the oyster.' One of these was to have the government instruct fishermen on the methods of oyster culture and its importance, 'through demonstration and ... through suitable printed literature.' Stafford wanted the demonstration to be of the type offered by the model

44 Commission of Conservation, *Report of the Fourth Annual Meeting, 1913* (Toronto, 1913), 83.

45 Ibid., 180.

46 *Fifth Annual Report, 1914*, 6.

and experimental agricultural farms run by the Canadian government.[47] A future oyster-farming researcher, Dr J.C. Medcof, wrote in 1961:

> Even in Pre-Confederation days there was some oyster farming in Prince Edward Island but it, too, was of the rule-of-thumb kind. It was not until the turn of the century when overfishing had done its worst that Dr. Joseph Stafford, an early associate of the Fisheries Research Board, laid the basis for scientific oyster farming in Canada ... In the period 1904 to 1913 he conducted investigations that have made his name familiar to oyster biologists the world over. He also gave advice on management of our oyster resources. His advice was sound.[48]

The Commission of Conservation made its greatest contribution to the oyster fisheries in aiding Stafford to publish *The Canadian Oyster.* This work served as a foundation for later research and oyster cultivation efforts. As for the other investigations into oyster problems conducted by the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals, these were mostly redundant. While no other specific group dealt with the oyster-culture problem with the same degree of thoroughness as the Committee, a debate in the House of Commons 5 December, 1910, showed a penetrating understanding of the issues on the part of several of the Members of Parliament. L.P. Brodeur, the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, and A.B. Wharburton – between them – touched on most of the points the Committee was later to raise.[49]

Interestingly, he made the only reference to the Commission of Conservation that I have found in any of the relevant House of Commons debates on fisheries. It came at the beginning of his speech, and was, at that, only a glancing reference:

> We know that the government have taken the very commendable step of appointing a Commission of conservation to consider the best means of conserving our natural resources, the commission has held

47 Joseph Stafford, *The Canadian Oyster* (Ottawa, 1913), 122–3.

48 Kenneth Johnstone, *The Aquatic Explorers* (Toronto, 1977), 45.

49 *Debates*, 5 December 1910, 724–65. It would be interesting to know when Patton drafted his report (which was published in mid-1911) and what lines of communication existed between the Commission of Conservation and the Parliament at Ottawa. On 5 December 1910, A.B. Wharburton, MP, (Queen's Prince Edward Island) gave a long and impassioned speech about the plight of the oyster, in eloquent terms which must have brought tears to the eyes of any listening oyster gastronome, and moved even the most stolid eater of beef-steaks. In this speech, although in different words, he gave voice to every concern and recommendation included in Patton's report. He did not refer to Patton, so it is not knowable from the Commission of Conservation publications or from the transcripts of the House of Commons debates if he was in any way inspired by Patton, or indeed, if the reverse was true.

> meetings in Ottawa and elsewhere, and are making very vigorous efforts to carry out the object for which it was appointed.

He talked about governmental projects in other fisheries to aid other fisheries, then said: 'But so far no effort, to my knowledge, except a tentative one, by private individuals, has been made towards the culture and conservation of the oyster.' (See *Debates*, 5 December 1910, 714–65.) Any connection between the Commission of Conservation and Wharburton's speech remains at best ambiguous, or – far more likely – non-existent. Most particularly, attempts to settle the conflicts in jurisdiction regarding the leasing of oyster bottoms had begun even before Patton had submitted his January 1911 report ('The Canadian Oyster Industry') to the Commission. Therefore, it is highly problematic that the Commission could claim any responsibility for the steps that were taken to ease the way of oyster culture in the Maritimes.

What the Committee did accomplish by this early investigation was to get a feel for the kinds of labour to which it was suited. In ensuing work concerning the fisheries more generally, the Committee restricted itself to making suggestions for highly practical improvements to the fisheries, such as the education of fishermen on recent technological improvements in their industry and the standardization of fish packaging.

THE COMMITTEE AND OTHER FISHERIES

The Committee was repeatedly told by members of the Biological Board of Canada and the Department of Marine and Fisheries that the herring, cod, hake, haddock, halibut and other entirely marine fishes were in no danger of depletion in Canadian waters. J.J. Cowie, of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, assured the Committee that 'climatic conditions in Canadian waters provide a natural protection against depletion. For three or four months of each year there is an enforced close time, during which little or no fishing takes place.' Furthermore, the Gulf of St Lawrence, 'that immense fish-breeding area – is virtually closed to fishing from December to May; ... the spawning season for cod, haddock, hake and such fish.'[50]

Professor Edward E. Prince was even more emphatic about this. The founder and chairman of the Biological Board of Canada, he was a guest speaker at the fourth annual meeting of the Commission of Conservation,

50 J.J. Cowie, 'Sea-Fisheries of Eastern Canada,' in Commission of Conservation, *Sea-Fisheries of Eastern Canada* (Ottawa, 1912), 109.

where Cecil Jones expressed concern over the charges that steam trawling 'affects injuriously the feeding ground of the fish' besides destroying immature fish which 'were thrown overboard and wasted.'[51] Prince responded: 'It is practically impossible to exterminate sea fish on account of the abundance of their eggs.'[52] He was sanguine: 'So productive are the fish that if there are any areas that are sanctuaries, they will be preserved.'[53] Even more strongly: 'The lobster has been pursued more perhaps than any other fish, yet it is to be found in large numbers during some seasons. How is it? It is because the grounds around our coasts are so unparalleled that you cannot clean them out.'[54]

These comments reflected Prince's own beliefs and were a legacy of his stay at St Andrew's, Scotland where he worked from 1885 to 1892 as chief assistant to Professor William Carmichael M'Intosh, the renowned marine biologist. M'Intosh believed that 'however intensively man fished ... he could not interfere with the fecundity of the seas, which was indestructible.'[55] This unfortunate teaching was apparently passed on to Archibald Gowanlock Huntsman, who directed the Biological Station at St Andrews, New Brunswick, from 1919 to 1934, and who was a protégé of Prince's.[56]

Evidently the Committee, which, after all, was not expert in such matters, was satisfied with this sort of testimony, for its members never turned their attention to the conservation (as in preservation) of Atlantic fishes. Rather, they concentrated on the practical problems which were hampering the fishing industry, such as the need for more attention from the government, fish-packing and curing and the education of fishermen. Their interest in these problems long predated the Biological Board's later participation in practical fisheries problems – such as freezing fresh fish – which mostly dated after World War I. Prince and the Biological Board

51 *Fourth Annual Report, 1913*, 98.

52 Ibid., 101.

53 Ibid., 102.

54 Ibid., 103–4.

55 A.E. Gunther, *William Carmichael M'Intosh, F.R.S.* (Edinburgh, 1977), 93.

56 The relationships between these men and their influence on fisheries policies in Canada will be discussed in my PhD dissertation concerning E.E. Prince, A.G. Huntsman and the Canadian Atlantic fisheries.

may have served as expert witnesses before the Commission, but they had no political input into the Commission's work nor control over the direction of the Committee's interests. The Commission carved out its own niche in fisheries problems, one which encountered little competition from other groups.

At the first meeting of the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals in September, 1912, many reports on diverse matters were presented. Some of these were treated as purely informational, and the Committee took no action on the problems discussed. Into this category fell presentations on the Canadian shad fishery by Prince,[57] and Canadian fish culture and lobster fisheries by W.A. Found.[58,59] In such cases there were commissions already in place or much work was in progress, and Committee members must have realized that any efforts on their part would be entirely superfluous.

A report about the 'Needs of the Fisheries of Nova Scotia,' presented by Howard Murray, set the tone for the Committee's ensuing concerns relating to fisheries other than the oyster fisheries. Many statistics on Nova Scotia fisheries were put forth, as were the desires of the people of Nova Scotia for improvements in the fisheries. Nova Scotians wanted a Deputy Minister of Fisheries to be appointed under the Minister of Marine and Fisheries because there was so much fisheries work that needed doing. This induced the Committee to adopt a resolution to this effect in 1914.[60] Nova Scotians also wanted a provincial fisheries agency to be established, to

> ... look after the Provincial statistics ... see to the enforcing of regulations, ... make itself useful in an educational way throughout the Province, ... keep constantly in touch with conditions throughout the Province, and ... form a much needed connecting link between the local trade and the Department at Ottawa.[61]

However, W.A. Found circumvented any Committee resolutions on this matter at the Committee meeting on the sea-fisheries of Eastern Canada

57 Edward E. Prince, 'The Shad Fishery of Canada,' in *Sea-Fisheries of Eastern Canada*, 120–39.

58 W.A. Found, 'Fish Culture in Canada,' ibid., 120–36.

59 W.A. Found, 'The Lobster Fishery of Canada,' ibid., 50–61.

60 *Debates*, 27 May 1914, 2494.

61 Dr Howard Murray, 'Needs of the Fisheries of Nova Scotia,' in *Sea-Fisheries of Eastern Canada*, 94–110.

by disclosing that a reorganization of the Marine Agencies was under consideration by the Minister of Marine and Fisheries. Evidently the Committee was not satisfied by the nature of these reforms, for at the fifth annual meeting (1914) it was resolved that such a 'Fisheries Agency be established in each of the Maritime Provinces'[62] as the people were calling for.

The Nova Scotian fisheries badly needed a standardization of pickled fish barrels, as did all Canadian fisheries. 'Even if one were to exercise the greatest care and see that his fish were put up properly, yet the fact that it comes from [the Maritime Provinces] would militate against its receiving the same consideration as fish from other countries and put up in a standard package.'[63] Standardization was only part of the problem, as the fishermen were not very careful in pickling and curing their fish, which had acquired, in consequence, a poor reputation. Thus, there was also a great need for an 'inspector of fish' to ensure standardization and quality control.[64]

Also at this meeting, J.J. Cowie of the Department of Marine and Fisheries presented a paper concerning the sea-fisheries of eastern Canada. The discussion that followed revolved around the deficiencies encountered in Canadian fisheries practices once the fish were caught – mainly the poor curing of fish, which made the end-product unpalatable; problems in transporting the fish to Central Canada; and the abuses of cold storage.[65]

Robertson suggested that fishermen badly needed instruction in the methods of curing fish: 'I have been amazed at the want of good sense in the first handling of fish towards curing or partly curing them for markets.' He also recommended that fishermen be instructed in the habits of fish, the means of catching them, 'navigation, the control of motor boats and kindred subjects.'[66] However, Found maintained that the Department of Marine and Fisheries was aware of the need to educate

62 *Fifth Annual Report*, 1914, 214.

63 Murray, 'Needs of the Fisheries of Nova Scotia,' 89.

64 Ibid.

65 Cowie, 'Sea-Fisheries of Eastern Canada,' 94–110.

66 *Sea-Fisheries of Eastern Canada*, 113, 114.

fishermen. It had appropriated ten thousand dollars to that end, but 'the method of doing this has not yet been decided upon.'[67]

At the 1912 meeting, no resolution for the education of fishermen was adopted, nor for the inspection of fish products and standardized packaging of pickled fish. Although these subjects were considered for a resolution, the resolution was withdrawn because of the need to think things out in more detail.[68] This was hardly the action of an 'irresponsible' Commission. A year later, at the fourth annual meeting, it was resolved '... that the Government of Canada should provide instruction for fishermen in the pursuit of their calling in a similar way to that in which it is providing instruction for farmers ...'[69]

Again, at the 1915 meeting the Committee - which was held to consider the conservation of fish, birds and game - Robertson brought up the same problems as before in his 'Technical Education in Relation to Fishermen's Occupations.' He pointed out that fishermen needed to be taught to manage with the new conditions in the transportation of fish, modern marketing methods and the more exacting demands of consumers.[70] He gave examples of the ways in which foreign nations were providing education to update their fishermen, then proffered some suggestions for improvement in Canada. Two resolutions resulted and were adopted at the 1915 meeting. One urged the Federal and provincial governments to provide vocational education for those employed in the fishing industry, and the other recommended

> ... the institution, as soon as practicable, of simple Demonstration Stations, the employment of competent travelling instructors, and the distribution of well-illustrated bulletins dealing with the practical problems arising from fisheries occupations.[71]

The Fisheries Inspection Act of 1914 had not included any provision for the education of fishermen, but it was realized that it would be necessary

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67 Ibid., 118.

68 Ibid., 174.

69 *Fourth Annual Report, 1913*, 180.

70 James W. Robertson, 'Technical Education in Relation to Fishermen's Occupations,' in Commission of Conservation, *Conservation of Fish, Birds, and Game* (Toronto, 1916), 30.

71 *Op. cit.*, 164.

to teach fishermen the proper methods for curing fish. Mr Hazen declared that the Department of Marine and Fisheries would do that as far as possible; inspectors were to travel around to gatherings of fishermen where information would be dispensed. First, to interest the fishermen into coming, literature about the new inspection regulations would be distributed by the inspectors.[72] This was by no means what the Commission had asked for or recommended as an adequate measure for educating fishermen, but it allowed itself moderate self-congratulation for new advances in vocational education for fishermen.[73]

This continuing interest in bettering the vocational education of fishermen was, as far as I know, unique to the Commission of Conservation among government agencies. The Department of Marine and Fisheries paid lip-service to the problem, and one or two individuals in the Federal government expressed concern over the issue, but the vocational education of fishermen nowhere else received the sustained and intensive interest it deserved.

The concern for the standardization of fish products was expressed in two resolutions adopted at the fourth annual meeting in 1913. One urged the Department of Marine and Fisheries to find out how other countries cured and graded fish and indicated on the packages the grade of fish being sold, and then to apply this new knowledge to improve the Canadian fisheries.[74] The other resolution more specifically urged the advisability 'of a standardization of barrels and packages for pickled fish, oysters, and other fisheries products.'[75]

At the fifth annual meeting, Cowie, now of the Department of Naval Service in Ottawa, told the Commission some of the details of the Fisheries Inspection Act, which had passed its third reading on 19 May 1914. Although following some of the Commission's recommendations, it did not make inspection compulsory. Rather, inspection was voluntary and was done free of charge; but it was absolutely required for the use of the government brand. So far not many fishermen had been willing to pay the price for the regulation barrel which was also required to secure the

72 *Debates*, 8 May 1914, 3458.

73 Commission of Conservation, *Report of the Seventh Annual Meeting, 1916* (Montreal, 1916), 204.

74 *Fifth Annual Report, 1914*, 214.

75 Ibid.

brand, but many agreed that beneficial results would ultimately follow.[76] At the sixth annual meeting of the Commission held in January 1915, C.C. Jones said of the Fisheries Inspection Act that it was a step in advance, despite its 'admitted faults,' and that 'the Committee has been instrumental, to some extent at least, in bringing about the [Act].'[77]

During the fifth annual meeting, Prince presented two papers, one an informational report about 'The Biological Board of Canada' and the other about 'Unutilized Fisheries Resources of Canada.' In the latter, he talked about the wastage involved in throwing out unwanted fish species and in not using the offal and waste-products generated in the processing of commercial fish. Unpopular species quite frequently had a superior flavour, he claimed, and from fish waste could be generated glues, oils, feeds for cattle and swine, tanning products, fertilizer, and so on.[78] Later, at the eighth annual meeting on 16 and 17 January 1917, Sir Clifford Sifton was to report that a Mr J.B. Fielding had been investigating the uses of fish waste and offal for the Commission over the past year. He produced items such as those described by Professor Prince, demonstrating:

> ... that these valuable products can be profitably produced from an article which has hitherto been not only actually thrown away but has caused an expenditure in providing for its disposal. This is perhaps the most specific new feature of our work during the past year.[79]

The matter of this work, however, never went further.

The only other work undertaken by the Committee was its involvement in the general campaign to teach Canadians the value of fresh fish as food. Begun in 1915 and designed for the man in the street, the Committee's campaign was transmitted through *Conservation*, the official publication of the Commission of Conservation.[80] The government was encouraging people to eat fish in a move to combat the privation being experienced because of Canada's involvement in World War I. More expensive foodstuffs such as beef were being conserved to send to Britain.

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76 J.J. Cowie, 'Government Inspection and Branding of Fish,' in *Conservation of Fish, Birds, and Game*, 68.

77 *Sixth Annual Report, 1915*, 225.

78 Edward E. Prince, 'Unutilized Fisheries Resources of Canada, in *Conservation of Fish, Birds, and Game*, 47-60.

79 Commission of Conservation, *Report of the Eighth Annual Meeting, 1917* (Montreal, 1917), 16.

80 *Seventh Annual Report, 1916*, 205.

The Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals had little to do with fisheries in the last few years of the Commission. Sifton admitted at the eighth annual meeting that:

> The best means of securing the restoration of depleted fisheries, and of preventing the future depletion of these and other fisheries ... have not been definitely ascertained.[81]

Perhaps discouraged by a lack of response to many of their recommendations, the Committee delivered no fisheries reports after the eighth annual meeting.

EVALUATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Can the Commission of Conservation be accused of having pursued investigations on the Atlantic fisheries which other departments already had under way? The answer appears to be no, with one exception.

Despite the extent of interest the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals invested in it, the oyster-culture problem probably least needed the Committee's attention. In particular, the investigations into the legislative side of the oyster fisheries problems were unnecessary and redundant. However, as this was amongst the Committee's earliest work, the choice of a popular problem is perhaps understandable in a novice group such as the Committee. The recommendations emanating from the Committee's investigations were intelligent and in some cases novel, including calling for more research by scientists, better instruction for fishermen and better protection for those who attempted oyster farming.

One recommendation urged that the Department of Marine and Fisheries conduct research work into improved methods of oyster-culture and also carry out demonstration work on planting new oyster beds on barren grounds; this achieved limited success. Captain Ernest Kemp, in the employ of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, had been charged with exactly this kind of work, in collaboration with the Biological Stations, well before the Commission of Conservation had been organized. Some of the work done at the Biological Station at St Andrews already had a practical bent, but this was limited in the case of oyster research. In fact, the amount of research on oysters declined after the Commission's fourth annual report, in 1914, as Stafford's connection with the Biological Board of Canada ceased after the publication of *The Canadian Oyster*.[82] However, Captain Kemp continued to plant and monitor demonstration

81 *Eighth Annual Report, 1917*, 13.

82 *Debates*, 5 December 1910, 724–65.

oyster beds, in spite of the lack of success of his first attempts. Perhaps his efforts were continued because of the Commission's endorsement of this work.

The Committee's recommendation 'that the Government of Canada provide instruction for fishermen in pursuit of their calling ...'[83] received a peculiar twist in the case of oyster-farming. Captain Kemp was given some new duties. The first mention of this was given by the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, J.D.Hazen, on 19 March 1915 in the House of Commons. He informed the House that 'Mr. Kemp also gives advice and instruction to those who are taking up oyster culture.'[84]

The recommendation for amending the oyster fishery regulations so as to allow oysters from private beds to be fished for and sold all year round was not taken up as of 1920, probably because as yet oyster culture had not reached a scale where this would deserve much consideration. The fisheries protection services were reorganized in 1920 along lines similar to those recommended by the Commission, apparently in response to a Government investigation held in 1918.[85] Whether the Commission instigated the investigation is not clear.

Was oyster culture a flourishing success after all these efforts? Evidently not. One of the policies adopted for re-planting the oyster-beds was to import immature and mature American oysters. Professor Prince said at the 1915 meeting on the conservation of fish, birds and game: 'Prince Edward Island oysters have taken first place in the world for flavour and there is no danger of disease on the Island beds, such as is a cause of trouble in American and European beds.'[86] However, by 12 April 1918, Joseph Read was lamenting to the House of Commons that the introduction of a disease had 'decimated' the local oysters 'almost entirely': 'There is no question that the oyster industry of Malpeque ... is becoming almost extinct.'[87] The Biological Board of Canada later claimed that their researches exonerated the government policy of importing oysters because the turbellarian flatworms known to be the cause of the problems in America were not found in the Malpeque oysters.[88] This does not mean that some other

83 *Fourth Annual Report, 1913*, 180.

84 *Debates*, 19 March 1915, 1275.

85 Ruth Fulton Grant, *The Canadian Atlantic Fishery* (Toronto, 1934), 123.

86 *Conservation of Fish, Birds, and Game*, 79.

87 *Debates*, 12 April 1918, 274.

88 Johnstone, *op. cit.*, 84.

agent was not imported, however. The fact that it became 'endemic at Malpeque when the bay's oysters acquired a tolerance for it' and later spread to New Brunswick and 'temporarily reduced stocks there,'[89] strongly suggests that the disease was imported with the foreign oysters, in which it had gone unnoticed because these oysters had long since become tolerant to it.

Later, in 1934, in her book *The Canadian Atlantic Fishery*, Ruth Fulton Grant was to write:

> The Commissioner of Fisheries, in his report for 1876, emphasized the need for the prohibition of dredging to save the oyster beds from complete exhaustion. Unfortunately, subsequent events have demonstrated the truth of his warnings. The careful research of Dr. A.W.H. Needler, employed by the Biological Board of Canada, is pointing the way to a successful redevelopment of these beds.[90]

It appears that the Commission's calls for more research into the problems of the oyster fisheries and into discovering the means of managing these problems were not given enough heed. The Commission was looking in the right direction when it turned to research and scientific management as a way of avoiding the extinction of the oyster fisheries. In this and in the later involvement of the Commission in investigating means of utilizing fish wastes, the Commission showed an awareness that science could play an important role in moving the sea fisheries away from 'hunting' or 'raping' oceanic resources as if they were limitless, to 'husbanding' or 'nurturing' them and reducing the wastage involved in the way that farmers husband the land. It was a vision that was unfortunately at least half a century ahead of its time.

In the rest of the Atlantic fisheries investigations, there was no overlapping with the work of other agencies. The Committee did not involve itself with the problems connected with the transportation of fish or with fish hatcheries, frozen bait storage, the steam-trawling controversy, the international fishing disputes or the Atlantic coastal fishing limits, the dogfish reduction plants or other issues which were receiving adequate attention. It did not reopen the issues still unresolved by the Shad-Fishery Commission (1908–09), the Shell-Fisheries Commission (1912–13), the Lobster Fishery Commission (1909–10) or any other work to which it had nothing new to contribute. The resolutions put forth by the Committee reflected different concerns from these.

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89 Ibid.

90 Grant, *op. cit.*, 124.

The recommendations made by the Committee were intelligent and, if heeded, would have gone a long way to circumvent or at least alleviate the many problems faced by the Canadian Atlantic fisheries. As it was, Canadian fish products were long to suffer a terrible reputation on the world markets which, of course, greatly reduced their value and Maritime Canadian competitiveness. The Committee's many intelligent and practical suggestions were rarely taken up, despite the high political profile of some of the Committee members and of the guest speakers at their meetings.

The Commission called for reform in the workings of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, recommending that a Deputy Minister of Fisheries be appointed; this did not occur. It was not until 1930 that a separate Department of Fisheries was created, largely due to pressure from the Canadian Fisheries Association.[91]

In 1914 the Commission also called for the development of provincial fisheries agencies in each of the Maritime Provinces. Although the Department of Marine and Fisheries had set up a Fisheries Advisory Board - with one section in the Maritimes - in 1912, this did not provide all the services which the Committee had envisaged for its proposal. Such agencies were never created.

The recommendation for the standardization of fisheries products' packaging was taken up by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, in the Fisheries Inspection Act of 1914. The Commission of Conservation was very likely instrumental in this, as members of the Department were present at the meetings in which this need was discussed. However, to the disappointment of the Commission, inspection was not compulsory. An amendment to the Meat and Canned Foods Act was passed 14 July 1917, which required that all canning plants which packed seafood and the contents of those cans be inspected. The cans of seafood and the canneries were subject to inspection at any time.[92] In 1934, Ruth Fulton Grant lamented that inspection was not compulsory and that Canadian fisheries products still had a poor reputation because very inferior products were on the markets at the same prices as inspected fish products.[93]

The three resolutions pertaining to the education of fishermen obtained limited results. Fisheries inspectors were required to disseminate information on the methods of handling and curing fish if the products were to meet government standards. This was hardly the 'Demonstration Stations'

91 Ibid., 122.

92 *Debates*, 14 July 1917, 2114.

93 Grant, *op. cit.*, 130.

heartily recommended by the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals. In 1920, William Duff, MP, was to castigate severely the Government for its neglect of the Atlantic fisheries. He compared the paltry measures taken by the Canadian Government to inform its fishermen unfavourably with the free schooling offered by the German government in special schools run through the German Sea Fisheries Society. The courses they offered were tailored to local needs. Duff blamed much of the backwardness of the Canadian fisheries industry on the absence of schooling for fishermen.[94]

Indeed, Canadian Atlantic fisheries products were to suffer from a terrible reputation on international markets for many decades to come. They were frequently of inferior preparation, non-uniform quality and were not marketed according to any rigorous standards. Had the Commission's recommendations sparked an adequate response, many of these evils would have been minimized or banished.

Did the Commission on Conservation make any significant contribution to the state of the Canadian Atlantic fisheries? It is difficult to assess truly the contributions of the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals because the Commission was never mentioned in the Commons debates on fisheries. However, representatives from the Department of Marine and Fisheries were always in attendance at the special meetings held by the Committee. Therefore, although the Commission was never mentioned, these meetings must have, in some measure, influenced that debate. The Committee probably made its best contribution by holding forums at which experts from different walks of life could meet. Scientists could confer with politicians; fisheries officials met with both. Many ideas were exchanged. Surely the Committee succeeded in removing obstacles to the interchange of ideas by holding these meetings.

Even so, despite the high profile of some of those involved, these ideas did not go far. They were blighted by deep adversity. The sea fisheries were simply not important enough to the federal or some provincial governments. During the previous century, when the fisheries clashed with more lucrative lumber interests in Ontario and the Maritimes, it was always the powerful lumber barons who were successful in enlisting legislative support. Many fisheries were damaged or destroyed by sawdust and other sawmill refuse, but it took the combined interests of those desiring safer navigation, unpolluted drinking water and a healthier environment – as

94 *Debates*, 29 March 1920, 846.

well as fishing interests - finally to pressure governments into strictly enforcing anti-pollution laws at the turn of the century.[95] Perhaps even then this would have been impossible had not the sawn lumber industry already begun to decline and to re-tool itself for the production of pulp and paper and wood by-products, 'procedures which demanded more efficient utilization of mill wastes.'[96] The typically fragmented Atlantic fishing interests represented a very weak political force.

Further, since the previous century, Maritime governments and Maritimers themselves had been trying to reduce their dependence on primary economic activities such as fishing and to foster industrial expansion. In 1884 some 13% of goods production was accounted for by fish products in the Maritimes, but by 1910 this had dropped to 9% and to 5% by 1939. Between 1910 and 1939 the real output growth contracted by almost 1% per annum. As historian David Alexander noted:

> The industry was extraordinarily dependent upon international trade, and ... especially sensitive to the host of interwar disturbances, including the postwar inflation, [and] rising protectionism ... Compounding these external problems was a highly conservative and defeatist approach to potential changes in product, catching and marketing on the part of industry and government.[97]

It was against this conservatism and defeatism that the Commission of Conservation had pitched its unsuccessful battle. The provincial governments may not have been so indifferent to the predicament faced by their fisheries, but at a time when the Atlantic Provinces were having trouble funding ordinary education, it is understandable that they were unwilling to add to their burden the technical training of fishermen and other costly measures called for by the Commission.

The real blame for inaction must lie with the Federal Government which, at any rate, had most responsibility for the fisheries. Perhaps, if the Commission had made its main recommendations prior to 1913 and 1914 or had World War I not intervened, the Canadian government would have taken more notice of the Atlantic fisheries. But even without the obstacles posed by the war, Maritime influence was waning within Confederation. Between 1891 and 1921, Maritime federal representation was reduced fol-

95 See Gilbert Allardyce, 'The Vexed Question of Sawdust River Pollution in Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick,' *The Dalhousie Review* 52 (1972), 177-90; and R. Peter Gillis, 'Rivers of Sawdust: The Battle Over Industrial Pollution in Canada, 1965-1903,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 (1986), 84-103.

96 Gillis, *op. cit.*, 100.

97 David Alexander, 'Economic Growth in the Atlantic Region, '1880-1940,' in *Atlantic Canada After Confederation: The Acadiensis Reader, Volume Two*, eds. P.A. Buckner and David Frank (Fredericton, 1985), 165-6.

lowing every census. This was due in part to the decline in Maritime population in proportion to the rest of Canada, especially the newly-added Western provinces which underwent a phase of rapid expansion.

As Ottawa increasingly turned its attention westward, former bulwarks of the Maritime economy were undermined. Tariff protection on Maritime goods was weakened, and the Maritimes fell a round behind the Western Provinces in Federal subsidy increases. Most importantly, special freight rates for westward-moving Maritime produce on the Intercolonial Railway were abolished in 1919, and the railway lost much of its regional autonomy when, in 1918, an order in Council removed its head offices from Moncton, New Brunswick to the headquarters of the Canadian Northern Railway at Toronto, with the accompanying change in personnel.[98] The action came in response to Western criticism that Maritimers paid from 25% to 78% less in freight rates than did the Western provinces for the same services and that Canadian taxpayers were burdened with subsidizing these rates.[99] The result was that the Maritimes lost much of any economic competitive edge that they might formerly have possessed – handicapped by their distance from Central Canadian markets – and, ironically, under the new system, the railway deficit grew much more rapidly than ever.[100]

With the 1919 Railways Act amendment, which provided for the integration of the government railways into a single unit, the Dominion government had acquired the Grand Trunk. Now Central Canada had 'a vested interest in Portland, Maine, a major competitor of the Maritimes' ports for Canada's winter trade.'[101] Fish caught by Americans in Canadian waters could be transported more cheaply and swiftly to Central Canadian markets than could Canadian fish along the longer, slower and now unsubsidized Intercolonial.

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98 Ernest R. Forbes, *Maritime Rights. The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919–1917: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal, 1979), 25.

99 Ibid., 25.

100 Ibid., 71. According to Forbes, in forty years of operation, the total net operating deficit of the Intercolonial was less than $6 million. In the first year after official integration in the CNR, the operating deficit of the Atlantic section was $5 million. Deficits for the three years 1923 to 1925 The Maritime Rights movement of the early 1920s was born in response to the frustration and anger caused by Federal indifference to the fate of the Maritimes.

101 Ibid., 26.

It is hardly surprising that the Commission's recommendations to improve the Maritime fisheries fell on deaf ears after the War. If Ottawa was already less than receptive to Maritime needs and was cutting back on programs already in existence, how much less receptive would the Federal Government be to new programs that called for increased Federal expenditures to improve the Atlantic fisheries, which accounted for a mere 2% of total Canadian goods production?[102] And, in fact, schemes for helping the fisheries were also being cut back.

A blow to Canadian fishermen dealing in fresh, frozen or refrigerated fish was the 1919 removal of a federal subsidy that had been in place since 1908. One-third of the cost of less than carload lots in refrigerated cars had been subsidized on fast freight trains going from the Strait of Canso to Montreal, a measure intended to encourage the fresh fish trade.[103] Thus, even while the Commission of Conservation was yet in existence, Canadian Atlantic fisheries lost ground in Federal esteem.

> The new weakness of the Maritimes was real: The government's persistence in the implementation of a railway policy so hostile to Maritime interests in the face of strong Maritimes opposition was a graphic illustration of the decline of Maritime influence in the formation of Dominion policy.[104]

With such a decline in their power, Maritime politicians had more important problems on their minds than the defence of a mere, largely Central Canadian commission from Prime Minister Arthur Meighen's scurrilous attacks in 1921. In selecting the Commission of Conservation's fisheries work as one of his prime targets, Meighen was probably choosing an area of the Commission's work which would seem least important and hence most wasteful to a westward, Prairie-oriented Parliament and one which could be attacked with impunity.

'It was common knowledge that Meighen and Sifton did not get on well and were always at odds,' according to Janet Foster.[105] Although Sir Clifford Sifton had resigned as Chairman of the Commission in 1918, he was still its strong advocate. The abolition of the Commission was largely a

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102 Alexander, *op. cit.*, 165.

103 Forbes, *op. cit.*, 8. 'By 1919, when it was discontinued, the subsidy was costing the federal government about fifty thousand dollars annually.'

104 Ibid., 26–7.

105 Foster, *op. cit.*, 215.

political move for, as Mr Fielding suggested at the end of the debate, the Conservatives could have restructured the Commission, bringing it 'under the authority of some responsible minister,'[106] in a regular department of the government; 'The sad fact is that the government showed little interest or enthusiasm in 1921 to salvage an advisory board that had been created by Laurier and the Liberals in 1909.'[107]

Prime Minister Meighen was wrong to condemn the work of the Committee on Fisheries, Game and Fur-Bearing Animals on account of its lack of expertise. The dedicated core of this Committee always followed the very commendable procedure of educating itself on each issue by hearing what the best authorities had to say. The members carefully considered the facts and often delayed making a recommendation until they were satisfied that they knew the facts. They acted in a responsible manner, contrary to Meighen's accusation. It was not due to their supposed incompetence that their recommendations had so little effect nor to any weakness in the recommendations they made. Rather, this was the fault of a short-sighted series of Federal Governments that implemented policies which crippled rather than aided the Maritimes' regional economy. Rather than trying to help the Maritime fisheries become more competitive and valuable, the Federal policy was to allow the industry to limp along by itself, becoming less productive, less valuable and more a potential source for future trouble.

106 *Debates*, 26 May 1921, 3970.

107 Foster, *op. cit.*, 214.